

TRUE STATE

OF THE

CONTROVERSY

WITH

Mr. FOSTER,

On the Subject of

HERESY;

In Answer to

His SECOND LETTER.

By HENRY STEBBING, D. D.

Chaplain in Ordinary to his MAJESTY, and
Preacher to the Hon. Society of *Gray's-Inn*.

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THE STATE

OF THE

COMMONS

THE HOUSE

OF COMMONS



A N

A N S W E R

To Mr. F O S T E R ' S

Second L E T T E R.



AFTER above a Year's Silence, Mr. *Foster* has thought fit to publish an Answer to my Second Letter. The Reasons of his Delay, he tells us, are *to himself*, and with himself I am willing to leave them. I do not intend to dispute particular Points with him over again: Those who read with Judgment, will (I hope) see the Occasion for it. But since it is natural to presume that Mr. *Foster* has now given us his *best* as well as his *second* Thoughts, and because the Subject is of great Importance, I think it proper to give such an Account of the present State of the Controversy, as may enable any common Reader to judge where the Merits of the Cause lie; in which I cannot avoid repeating so much of what has been already said, as is necessary to shew the Progress of the Argument, as it has been managed on both Sides.

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The

The general Question is, Who are Hereticks in such a Sense as will justify the Church in excluding them from the Privileges of visible Communion? Mr. *Foster* says, They are those only who make a Profession contrary to the Christian Faith, in Opposition to the Sense and Conviction of their own Minds. My Opinion is, that whoever openly oppugns the Christian Doctrine, whether with Conviction or against Conviction, whether sincerely or insincerely, is a Heretick; and if he reforms not upon proper Admonition, may and ought to be debarr'd the Privileges of Christian Communion.

Upon this Foot the Controversy at first set out, and has all along proceeded. But Mr. *Foster* has in this last Performance started a new Thought, which, because it *seemingly* affects the State of the Question, and is deliver'd out with an Air of great Importance, and Show of fair Dealing, must here be taken Notice of.

" I beg leave (says he) to subjoin to the Observations which I formerly made, that upon reviewing and considering the Matter more carefully, I can see no Reason to believe that *departing from the Faith* is at all *essential* to the Character and Guilt of a Heretick.—— For Sects or Heresies may be formed about *Rituals*, about Things in themselves *indifferent*, and confessed to be *indifferent*, as well as about Points of *Doctrine*. And if the Leaders of these Sects act against their inward Convictions, they may justly be describ'd (let them be ever so Orthodox in Matters of mere Faith) as *factious*, *ill-designing*, *self-condemned* Hereticks. Second Letter, p. 9.

In the next Page we have the following Marginal Note:

" In

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" In my Sermon I paraphrased these Words,
" *A Heretick is subverted, thus,—He is turned aside*
" *from the true Faith.* But the learned Reader
" will see that there was no solid Foundation for
" this Paraphrase; and I myself am fully con-
" vinced of it. And thinking it in controversial
" Writings an Act of Justice to the Publick to
" acknowledge an Error of which I am con-
" vinced, I take this only Opportunity, which I
" have at present, to correct every thing, both
" in the Sermon and in my first Letter, that in-
" timates *departing from the Faith*, or maintaining
" Doctrines contrary to Christianity, to be a
" necessary Part of the Heretick's Character,
" whom St. Paul hath condemned.

He concludes thus :

" It is almost needless to add, that this Alter-
" ation is not owing to any Thing in your
" Reasoning, the *whole* of which it directly op-
" poses."

It is very commendable, no doubt, when Men can bring themselves to acknowledge their Mistakes, whether *real* or *imaginary*. And if Mr. Foster had *reviewed* and *considered* the Matter with the Care and Impartiality he pretends to, he *might* have found many *proper* Occasions in the Course of the Argument to give Proof of his Ingenuity. But as to this particular Instance, I must take the Liberty to say, He has no Merit to plead from it; for nothing *depends* upon it. Mr. Foster now thinks, that Heresies may be formed as well about Rituals as about Points of Doctrine. Be it so. What is this to the Purpose? I never had any Dispute with the Gentleman upon this Question, nor ever meant or mean to have any. The Point with me is, Whether *Self-condemnation*, i. e. (as Mr. Foster explains) *acting against Conviction*, is necessary to constitute

the Notion of a Heretick ; and this Question will not at all be affected by adjusting the particular *Matter* about which Heresy may be conversant. Mr. *Foster's* first Account of Heresy (as he himself confesses) was, that it was a *Departure from the Faith*. Thus far I found no Fault with him ; for this (whether right or wrong) was not the Thing that gave the Offence. But the Offence was taken (and, as I conceive, justly taken) at his saying, That no Departure from the Faith is Heresy, to the Purposes of Church Discipline, UNLESS the Person is *conscious* to himself of his being in the *wrong*. This is the single Point that I have opposed ; and therefore it is so far from being true, that this After-thought of Mr. *Foster's* opposes the whole of my Reasoning, that my Reasoning has nothing to do with it ; and the Gentleman's boasted Disposition to do *publick Justice* comes out at last to be no more, than a very strong Propension to *contradict* any Thing that I say, though he has before said it himself. But the Reader, I hope, will take Notice that the State of the Question stands just where it did ; and that whether I agree with Mr. *Foster* in this new Notion of Heresy, or whether I differ from him, the Dispute will not advance one jot, on either Side, nearer to a Conclusion.

To speak therefore to the Purpose ;

Mr. *Foster* founds his Notion of Heresy upon that Passage of St. Paul, Tit. iii. 10, 11. *A Man that is an Heretick after the first and second Admonition, reject ; knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself*. The main Stress of the Argument rests upon the Force of this Expression, *he is condemned of himself*, which Mr. *Foster* interprets as signifying that he is condemned in his own Mind or Conscience ; and thence infers, That no one is such a Heretick

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as the Church may reject, but he who is *thus* self-condemned. I have given another Interpretation of this Passage, which I submit, as it stands in my second Letter, to the Judgment of the Learned, to whom alone the Appeal lies. But whether my Interpretation be right or not; the great Question will still be, Whether Mr. Foster's is not *wrong*? and there is this Consideration which shews it to be so, *viz.* That if none are Hereticks, or to be rejected as such, but those who act against Conviction, the Apostle has given an impracticable Rule. Men must be *known* to be Hereticks before they are rejected as such. But, Who knows but God, whether, when a Man opposes the Truth, he *does* or does *not* act against Conviction?

Here liest he Difficulty: Which Mr. Foster foresaw; and to guard against it had recourse to the Gift of Discerning Spirits, *i. e.* (as he interprets) the Power of *knowing Mens Hearts* by Inspiration. This Gift, he supposed, was granted to the Apostles, to *Titus*, and other Persons of his Office and Character in the Church, who, in virtue of it, were enabled to judge of Heresy. What I have said as to the *real Existence* of any such Gift in the primitive Church, or the *Exercise* of it in *Ecclesiastical Discipline*, needs not to be reconsidered; because Mr. Foster is now determined to DROP *this as a FOREIGN Point*; and says, that *whether my Opinion or his, about the Gift of Discerning Spirits, be admitted, the main Controversy will not be in the least affected by it* *. Any one will believe that Mr. Foster would not have dropt this as a foreign Point, but upon the fullest Conviction that it can never be made to serve his Purpose; and thus much is clear and manifest,

* 2^d Letters, p. 57.

that allowing to Mr. *Foster* his Hypothesis, it will go at most no farther than to shew, that the Rule was practicable in the Age of Miracles. And if the Rule is practicable upon *no other* foot than this, the Right to judge and reject Hereticks is now at an End, and has been so ever since Miracles have ceased. This Consequence is unavoidable; and Mr. *Foster* was so far from being afraid of it, that he made no Scruple, in virtue of his Interpretation of the Apostolick Rule, at once to throw out the whole Discipline of the Church, in rejecting Hereticks, as practised from the Days of the Apostles till now, as Usurpation and Tyranny. This was the Reason, and the only Reason of my opposing his Interpretation, as appears from both my Letters. *Your INTENTION in maintaining that he only is a Heretick, who knowingly espouses a false Doctrine, is to shew the UNREASONABLENESS — of DEBARRING Men the Privilege of Christian Communion for Heretical Opinions.* First Letter, p. 5. Again, — *Your MEANING is, — That ALL Censures of others, EXCLUDING them from the Privileges of Christian Communion for Heretical Opinions, are WRONG.* And second Letter, p. 61. *It was for the Sake of this CONSEQUENCE ALONE that I opposed your Interpretation.* And, p. 68. *Had this been your Case, that you had thought your Interpretation reconcilable to the ordinary Discipline of the Church, you should have enjoyed it quietly for me.* The Reader perceives that I opposed Mr. *Foster's* Interpretation only to destroy the USE that he made of it in throwing all Discipline out of the Church. What now does the Gentleman say? Has he quitted his Notion of Heresy? No; he still holds it, that no one is a Heretick, but he who acts against Conviction. Does he then *justify* it, that there is now NO RIGHT in the Church to reject Hereticks, and

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and that all Exercise of Discipline in such Cases, since the Cessation of Miracles, has been Usurpation? Nor this; But he says, that though he had recourse to the Gift of Discerning Spirits, as a way of removing the grand Objection, which he thought would be generally convincing, &c. — he did not consider it as the only way. For (adds he) *Hereticks* MAY be known WITHOUT this Gift; and I HAVE NEVER ONCE ASSERTED THE CONTRARY*. I had this Answer before in his first Letter. *Tho' (says he) it be my Opinion, That now, when extraordinary Illuminations and Assistances are ceased, it is a Point of great NICETY to judge of Heresy — it can by no Means be inferred from thence, that I think Heresy can NEVER be known.* P. 48, 49. Again, p. 50. I have NEVER ASSERTED that *Hereticks* CANNOT NOW BE KNOWN, nor consequently REJECTED. I consider'd this as a mere Evasion, and am still suspicious that it is nothing better, for a Reason which shall be mentioned in due time. But since the same Thing is said, and repeated, and nothing else offered, we are to look upon this (whatever it comes to) as his final Answer; in which if there be any proper Meaning, it must be this, viz. That notwithstanding no one is a Heretick but he who acts against Conviction, yet the Church may now judge of Hereticks, and has a Right to reject them. Whether this be true or not; that is, whether a Right in the Church to judge and reject Hereticks can stand with Mr. Foster's Notion of Heresy, is another Matter; But, true or false, every one sees that Mr. Foster, though he holds his NOTION of Heresy, quits his USE of it; i. e. gives up every thing in the Controversy that is worth the contending for.

* 2^d Letter, p. 57.

8 *An ANSWER to*

One Thing only it concerns me to answer. Mr. *Foster* says, That he NEVER ONCE asserted that *Hereticks cannot be known without the Gift of Discerning Spirits*; which is denying that he ever made that USE of his Interpretation which I say he has made of it, and upon which the whole Controversy is grounded. This is a Point that I *must* try for my own Sake; and, that I may not appear to the World to be a mere Trifler, I must beg the Reader's Indulgence whilst I lay the several Passages together. I begin with the Sermon *, where are these Words :

“ If Heresy be an Error of the Will, and
 “ such only can be guilty of it who are con-
 “ demned of themselves; How can we cer-
 “ tainly know, in most Cases at least, whether
 “ a Man be an Heretick or not? — Indeed,
 “ in the first Age of Christianity, (N. B.) when
 “ the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost
 “ were communicated, of which one was the
 “ Gift of Discerning Spirits, the Matter might
 “ be more easily decided. And *Titus* particu-
 “ larly, to whom *St. Paul* directs the Advice in
 “ the Text, can't be supposed, considering his
 “ Character and Office, to have been without
 “ these Powers. But (N. B.) WHAT RULE
 “ have we, now these extraordinary Illumina-
 “ tions and Assistances are ceased, by which to
 “ CONDUCT OURSELVES in Inquiries of this
 “ Nature ?

“ If it be said, that such wicked Deceivers
 “ are generally known by their Fruits, and that
 “ their vicious Lives will shew us by what View
 “ they are acted, and the vile Design of their
 “ Imposture ; I answer, That even upon this
 “ Supposition, I should think it better that they

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“ be rejected for their *Immorality*, which is no-
“ torious and palpable, than for *Heresy*, of which,
“ perhaps we can't so certainly judge. But
“ what if they are so cautious as to keep clear
“ of all open Vices, and affect an Air of Sanctity
“ in order the more effectually to secure their
“ End; In such Cases as these, I say, what can
“ we do, be they ever so wicked in *Principle*
“ and *Intention*, but leave them to God the su-
“ preme and only Judge of Conscience. And
“ since 'tis so difficult for us, in most Instances,
“ certainly to judge of Heresy, why should we
“ be forward to charge it on our Brethren for
“ every trifling Difference of their Sentiments
“ from ours? And above all, Why should we
“ be so unrighteous as to impute it to Men of
“ honest Principles and exemplary Lives, who,
“ as has been shewn, are quite the Reverse of the
“ Hereticks mentioned in the New Testament;
“ and if St. Paul's Authority be of any Weight
“ cannot possibly have incurred that Guilt?

“ But after all; the Truths which they deny
“ are so clear, and supported by such Evidence,
“ as necessarily to approve themselves to every
“ honest and impartial Inquirer; and therefore
“ you are positive, that notwithstanding their
“ seeming Piety and Strictness of outward Mo-
“ rals, there is a latent Corruption in their
“ Hearts, and they are influenced by some evil
“ Affection or other, though it does not appear
“ publickly; either by a Love of Singularity,
“ Pride, Ambition, &c. or are under the Power
“ of some vicious Prejudice. This is constantly
“ said by *Bigots* and *Enthusiasts*, and especially
“ by such as are themselves most in the wrong,
“ notwithstanding the most solemn and repeated
“ Declarations of their Opponents to the con-
“ trary; and consequently, as it will serve for

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either

“ either Side of any Question, can have no
 “ Effect on sober and considerate Minds, but
 “ will be look’d upon as the Result of Passion
 “ and Partiality. But besides, why are we so
 “ conceited of our own Understandings? Are
 “ we *infallibly* sure that we are in the right?
 “ Modesty forbids us to assert this *directly*, tho’
 “ all such Reasonings necessarily imply it.”

I have set down this Passage without Defalcation, that the Reader may be secure that nothing is suppressed which may serve Mr. *Foster’s* Purpose. And let any one tell me, whether it is not as clear as the Sun at Noon-day, that in virtue of his Interpretation of the Apostolick Rule, he has thrown out the ordinary Discipline of the Church, in rejecting Hereticks as Hereticks. It is not only here asserted that we have *no Rule*, now extraordinary Illuminations and Assistances are ceased, by which *to conduct our selves in Inquiries of this Nature*, but all other ways of judging Heresy are expressly set aside. Are the Doctrines opposed plain and clear? — This is the Pretence of *Bigots* and *Enthusiasts*; and will equally serve on either Side of the Question. Are the Opposers vicious and immoral in their Lives and Conversations? In this Case they are to be rejected, ’tis true: But for what? Why, for their *Immorality*; not for their *Heresy*, of which we cannot *so certainly* judge; *i. e.* of which we cannot judge with *sufficient* Certainty; for if we *could* judge with sufficient Certainty, why should they not be rejected for their *Heresy* as well as for their *Immorality*? Here is therefore no Rule of Judgment left besides the Gift of Discerning Spirits, which, in Effect, is declared to be the *sole Rule*, and (*foreign* as it is now represented to be) is of such *Importance* in Mr. *Foster’s* Scheme, that he has left the whole
 Weight

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Weight of his Interpretation to rest upon it. He Now says, That Hereticks may be known without this Gift. But, Why did he not say so *before*? or rather, Why, if this Gift was not by him thought *necessary* to the Discovery of Hereticks, did he at all concern himself with it? His Pretence is, that he chose this Method of removing the grand Objection because he thought it to be the most unexceptionable and convincing. But if Mr. *Foster* understood what he was about, this *could not* be the Case; for there is neither Sense nor Propriety in the Method, unless it be *supposed* that the Right of judging Hereticks was *peculiar* to the first Ages. These were Mr. *Foster's* first Thoughts, which even now hang so strongly upon his Mind, that with all the Artifice he is Master of he is not able to conceal them. Great is the Power of Truth! And when Men once leave the plain Path in search of Expedients to serve a Turn, they commonly betray themselves.

To support the Argument yet farther, let us go on to Mr. *Foster's* Letter in the *Old Whig*, Numb. 15. which is so much the more worthy of Regard, because it was published at a Time, when he was not pinched with Difficulties, nor laying about for *Covers* under which to hide himself; but when he was in the full Meridian of his Glory, and fancy'd to himself that he was driving the whole World before him in Triumph. I took Notice of this Paper in my second Letter, p. 67. and have charged Mr. *Foster* with *confessing, in very strong Terms*, that *none* but those who are endued with preternatural Discernment are *FIT to decide* in Cases of Heresy. If this Charge is true, Mr. *Foster* stands Self-condemned. But, he says, it is *ABSOLUTELY FALSE*; and pray hear his Reason.

" My Words (says he) are, *And IF none, &c.*
 " *i. e.* allowing the Objection urged by the Au-
 " thor of the Miscellany to be rightly stated, or
 " taking it for granted, that upon my Notion
 " (*i. e.* his explanation of St. Paul's Notion) of
 " Heresy none but those who are endued with
 " preternatural Discernment are fit to decide,
 " &c. this is no Reflexion on St. Paul, who hath
 " never asserted the contrary. I am here vin-
 " dicating St. Paul's Character, and endeavour-
 " ing to shew, that if this Point *was* never so
 " clear and admitted on both Sides, it would be
 " no Disparagement to it. But is not this en-
 " tirely different from *confessing in strong Terms,*
 " or laying it down as MY OWN OPINION?
 " Can Things which are only *supposed* in Argu-
 " ment be justly said to be *asserted absolutely*?
 " Can what is not confessed *at all*, or in *any*
 " Terms, be said to be confessed in *strong Terms*?
 " I REPEAT IT ONCE MORE, Sir, that it nei-
 " ther *is nor ever was* my Sentiment, that Here-
 " ticks *could not* be known without the Gift of
 " Discerning Spirits." Second Letter, p. 59.

The Purport of this Answer is, That Mr. Fos-
 ter has not laid it down as *his own Opinion*, that
none are fit to decide in Cases of Heresy but those
 who have preternatural Discernment, but only
 argued *ex Hypothesi* to vindicate St. Paul's Cha-
 racter.— May St. Paul, and all the twelve
 Apostles be delivered from such Vindicators!
 For, In what is he to vindicate St. Paul's Cha-
 racter? Why, in laying down a Rule which he
 (Mr. Foster) *himself is willing to grant*, does im-
 ply that *none are fit* to decide in Cases of Heresy
 but those who have preternatural Discernment;
i. e. he is to vindicate St. Paul in having said
 a Thing which (in his own present Account)
 contains a very great Untruth! It is no Reflexion,
 (he

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(he says) upon St. Paul, who hath never asserted the contrary.— What if St. Paul hath not asserted the contrary? It is still an *Untruth*, if Mr. Foster is to be believed; for HE says, and *insists* upon it, That Hereticks *may* be known *without* this Gift; *i. e.* That *others* are fit to decide in such Cases, *as well as those* who are endued with preternatural Discernment. If Mr. Foster thought it consistent with the Character of an Apostle to say, That *none* are fit to decide in Cases of Heresy *but* those who are endued with preternatural Discernment, it must (surely!) be because he thought it to be *true*; and that he did so think, will be clear to any one who considers his Words. If *none but those*, &c. is *hypothetical* indeed in the *form* of the Expression; but the *Sense* may be *absolute* for all that, as every School-Boy knows. Take then the whole Passage together, and see if this is not the Case.

“ If none but those who are endued with this
“ preternatural Discernment are fit to decide in
“ Cases of Heresy, this is no Reflexion upon St.
“ Paul, who hath never asserted the contrary.
“ [But (N. B.) it should correct and restrain
“ the Insolence of others in pretending to a
“ Power which they are not entitled to] and
“ which neither the *Nature of the Thing itself*, nor
“ a Rule prescribed to a *particular Person* miraculously enlightened, and possessed of extraordinary Abilities, give them the least Ground
“ to claim.”

The Words which are included in Hooks are cited by me in my second Letter, as what *determined* the Sense of the foregoing Part of the Sentence. Mr. Foster in his Answer has set down the foregoing Part of the Sentence *only*, and *suppressed* all that follows; for this plain and obvious Reason, That if he had recited those Words,
it

it would *instantly* have appeared, that he was *not* arguing *ex hypothesi*, but delivering *his own Opinion*. Here is a charge of **INSOLENCE** in *pretending to a Power, which they are not entitled to*, laid against **ALL** those (for those are the *others* he means) who claim a Right in virtue of the Apostolick Rule to reject Hereticks in the present State of the Church. This Charge is Mr. *Foster's* own (for surely he will not say *this* was St. Paul's); and is it to be imagined, that he would have founded such a Charge merely upon an *Hypothesis* which he never thought to be *true*, but admitted only for *Argument sake*? It is too hard a Supposition.—There is no room for Dispute in the Case. The Thing is as clear as Words can make it, that it *was* Mr. *Foster's* Opinion, That the Rule of the Apostle to reject Hereticks was *prescribed to a PARTICULAR PERSON miraculously enlighten'd and limited to him*, and such as he was. If you can yet doubt, go but to the next Column in the same Paper, and you will find him declaring FOR HIMSELF, that *the Words of St. Paul were addressed to Titus ALONE, or extended ONLY to every one of his Successors, WHO IS ENDUED WITH THE SAME EXTRAORDINARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS*. Why this Limitation? Why, he tells you in express Terms; because, *in the NATURE of the Thing itself*, the Right to reject Hereticks can extend no farther. And, What does all this rest upon, but the very Principle which he now disclaims, *viz. That NONE are FIT to decide in Cases of Heresy but those who are endued with preternatural Discernment*? Mr. *Foster* surely wrote his second Letter in full Assurance that he should never be call'd to Account for it. But how is such repeated *denying* the plainest Matter of Fact in the World, to be *endur'd* in any one who pretends to be a serious Writer!

This

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This is the clear and plain State of the Case ;
and I now Appeal to the Reader, to consider with what *Decency* Mr. *Foster* has addressed himself to me in the following Words *. “ I
“ allow indeed these to be my Words,— How
“ can we certainly know, in most Cases at least, whether a Man be a Heretick or not?— What
“ Rule have we, now extraordinary Illuminations
“ and Assistances are ceas'd, &c.— It is a Point
“ of great Nicety to judge of Heresy in particular
“ Instances. The Meaning of all which Expressions, when considered and compared together,
“ can amount to no more than this, That we
“ may suspect and presume, but cannot certainly
“ know, at least in most Cases; That we have in
“ most Cases, or in general, no Rule, i. e. no sure
“ Rule; and of Consequence, that it is a Point of
“ great Nicety to determine in particular Instances, who is, in the Sense of St. Paul's Direction
“ to Titus, a Heretick. This, I say, is all that
“ my Words amount to when interpreted with
“ the utmost Rigour. But because I have not
“ said the Absurdity you would fain fasten upon
“ me; because I have not given you some Ground
“ to triumph by asserting absolutely and in universal Terms, that without supernatural Inspiration, or the Gift of Discerning Spirits, Hereticks cannot be known, therefore the Phrases
“ in most Cases at least, and—it is a Point of great
“ Nicety—which are in Truth the very Phrases
“ which shew, what was my real Sentiment,
“ must pass, in your polite Style, for Grimace, and
“ Skuffling, and saving Clauses. And you still,
“ IN YOUR GREAT MODESTY, seem resolved to
“ insist upon it, that my Opinion is, That Hereticks can never be known, now extraordi-

* Second Letter, p. 57, 58.

" nary Illuminations are ceased both against my-
 " self, who should best understand my own Sen-
 " timents, and in the Face of the World who
 " have publick Evidence of the contrary."
 With Mr. *Foster's* *Suspensions*, and *Presumptions*
 I have nothing to do at present. What I have
 laid to his Charge, and what I still insist upon,
 is this, That he hath affirmed, that Hereticks
 cannot so be known without the Gift of Dis-
 cerning Spirits, as to JUSTIFY the Church in
 REJECTING them as Hereticks. The Evidence
 of this lies now before the World; let the
 World judge between us, and see who it is that
 wants *Shame*, he or I. The Gentleman himself
 confesses, that SOME of the *Expressions above menti-*
oned are TOO STRONG. Too strong indeed! for
 his Management; and this is not the worst of the
 Case neither; for the Construction of the *Argu-*
ment, as well as of the *Language*, lies full against
 him. And what can *softening Clauses* avail in such
 a Case, but to shew the *Confusion* of the Writer,
 and that Mr. *Foster*, when he undertook to treat
 upon Heresy, engaged in a Subject which he had
 never sufficiently consider'd?

The Result therefore is this; That Mr. *Foster's*
 original Plan excludes all Right in the Church,
 since the Cessation of Miracles, to reject Here-
 ticks as such. He now calls it in, and says, That
admitting his Notion of Heresy to be true, Hereticks
may be known, and upon good probable Evidence re-
jected in all Ages of the Church. If he could make
 it appear, That his Notion of Heresy is recon-
 cileable with the Discipline of the Church in
 rejecting Hereticks, as directed in Scripture, and
 as practic'd from the very Times of the Apostles
 till now; it would signify little to the Dispute,
 as it lies between him and me. For (as it has
 afore been observed) I opposed his Interpretation
 only

Mr. FOSTER's second Letter. 17

only for the sake of the *ill Use* he had made of it ; and since he has given up his *Use*, I have no Concern with his Interpretation. Let him take it, and make his best on't. But, though I look upon myself as thus far acquitted, yet I am desirous to do all the Justice I can to the Truth, and therefore will now undertake to shew, That Mr. Foster's new Scheme of Discipline will not do. Perhaps the Gentleman *himself* may want no Help to enable him to see this ; for I am strongly suspicious that he sees it himself. The Scheme manifestly rests upon a *Supposition* or *Concession* that the Church hath *now* a Right to judge and reject Hereticks : But it may be observed, That there is not a Text offered by me (and I have offered, I think, the most *considerable*) to support this Right, which Mr. Foster hath not endeavoured to overthrow. Feeble as his Attempts are, they shew it to have been *then* his Opinion, That the Church hath *no* Right to judge and reject Hereticks, unless you can believe that Mr. Foster would allow a Right in the Church, which has not a single Text in the Bible to support it. I do not find by his second Letter that he is better satisfied with my Arguments *now* than he was at first ; on the contrary, repeating the Texts, he goes on with his Cavils, and concludes *upon the Whole*, That they are *nothing to my Purpose* *. Whence then this sudden Change of Thought ? From *Conviction* do you think ? Is it not much more natural to suppose, That he was *driven* to it merely by *Distress* of Argument, and that he has *complimented* the Church with a Right to judge and reject Hereticks, only to avoid meddling any farther in a Subject in which, as a Christian Writer, he foresaw it would be impossible

* Second Letter, p. 11—13.

for him to succeed? In the Fulness and Overflowings of his Zeal he had branded the whole Christian Church with a Charge of *Insolence* and *Usurpation*; and this was the unavoidable Consequence of his *then declar'd* Principles. But perhaps it was not thought safe or prudent, to attempt to *justify* this Charge in cold Blood; *something* therefore was to be said to divert the Attention of the World another way— But I rest this Matter with himself; and that he may have no Handle to complain of unfair Dealing, I will take him at his *Word*, and inquire briefly, what Room there is for the Exercise of Discipline in rejecting Hereticks, upon Supposition, that Mr. *Foster's* Notion of Heresy is true. In order to this we must first settle one general Point, which is, *WHAT can or cannot be known* of Hereticks, without the Help of preternatural Discernment? And this is so much the more necessary to be done, because Mr. *Foster* has been pleased to set me forth as a great Dealer in Contradictions upon this Part of the Argument.

Mr. *Foster* set out with saying, That *we cannot CERTAINLY KNOW whether a Man be an Heretick or not*—that *we cannot CERTAINLY JUDGE of Heresy*. These are his own Terms as they lie in his Sermon. I agreed with Mr. *Foster*, that in his Account of Heresy, Hereticks *cannot* be known; meaning, that they cannot be *certainly* known. For *who* (said I) *can judge of the Heart of Man but God?* The Gentleman and I (you see) had no Difference at *first* upon this Point, nor could he have had any *now*, if he had stood to his first Scheme. But when he found it for his Purpose to say, That Hereticks *may* be known, he thought it convenient to make *me* say so too.

Mr. FOSTER's *second Letter.* 19

I will set down the Passages he mentions, and then submit it to the Reader to judge what a *modest, fair* Adversary I have to deal with.

I had said, that "it cannot even be suggested
" of uninspired Men, that they can judge of
" Mens Heart; and that therefore, if (as Mr.
" *Foster* maintain'd) none are to be rejected as
" Hereticks, but those who deny the Faith
" against Conviction, the Consequence is, that
" the Right of rejecting Hereticks ceased with
" the miraculous Gifts, &c.*" Upon this Mr.
Foster observes,— The Objection rests intirely
upon this, "That Hereticks cannot be known to
" act with an evil Intention, and against the Con-
" victions of their own Minds, because the Heart
" cannot be known, now the Gifts of Inspiration
" are ceased. And yet (says he) you contend in
" another Place, that the inward Subtily, De-
" ceit and Malice of the Heart of *Elymas* the
" Sorcerer, and the Principles and Motives by
" which he was influenced, might have been
" known without an immediate divine Revela-
" tion (and consequently in an Age when there
" were no Gifts of Inspiration) for this Reason,
" Because *every Tree is known by its Fruits*, and
" *evil Deeds* discover an *evil Heart*." He goes
on triumphantly, and adds,—"Here, Sir,
" you are unluckily caught in an irreconcilable
" Contradiction, and confuted by your own Pen.
" For if evil Deeds discover an evil Heart, we
" have *one* general Rule, at least, by which to
" know the Heart; and it may not only be *sug-*
" *gested* but *affirmed* of uninspired Men, that they
" *can* judge of the Heart; and thus the general
" Ground of your whole Reasoning is intirely
" destroyed †."

* Second Letter, p. 61. † Mr. *Foster's* second Letter, p. 61.

Pens, as well as *Swords*, are dangerous Instruments when they fall into unskilful Hands. And I am greatly deceived, or this random Stroke will recoil upon Mr. *Foster's* Head. What I said in the Case of *Elymas* the Sorcerer, was, that his *bad Works* proved him to be a *bad Man*, for I supposed that he would not pretend, that *Wizards* and *Conjurers* could be morally honest ||. But, what if *immoral Actions* shew an *immoral Man*, as they always will do, (because, as I have observed, *all Men DO or MAY know immoral Actions to be WRONG, if it be not their own Fault **) will it therefore follow, that every *immoral Man* is *self-condemned* in any Principle of revealed Religion which he holds? If you want an Answer, go to Mr. *Foster*, who will tell you, that an *immoral Life* is *no Evidence* of *Self-conviction* in such Cases †. If the Gentleman can justify himself, he will justify me; if he cannot, the Inconsistency may fall upon me, but it will fall upon himself too. But every one of Sense will perceive that there is great Difference between saying, That *bad Works* will shew a *bad Man*; and that *bad Works* will shew a *self-condemned Man*. A Man may be *bad thro' many Causes*; he can be *self-condemned* but by one.

But Mr. *Foster* says, That I “have plainly allowed that we may know, without any extraordinary Gift, that a Man is inwardly condemned by himself.” How does he make it appear, that I have allowed this? Why, it seems from my “granting that Mr. *Foster* has given an Instance, in which we may be infallibly certain that a Man knows himself to be in the “wrong §.” Now the Instance is this. Mr.

|| Second Letter, p. 45. * Second Letter, p. 66. † Serm. p. 304. § Second Letter, p. 64.

Mr. FOSTER's second Letter. 21

Foster had said, that, "if a Man teaches the Immorality of Theft, and yet is a Thief himself, he should have very good Reason to believe, that he (the *Man*) knew himself to be in the wrong." To which I answered; "Yes, Sir, you may infallibly be certain, that he knows himself to be in the wrong *in the one or in the other* †." What now is all this to Mr. Foster's Purpose? He is to prove, that I have allowed that we may know without any extraordinary Gift that a Man is self-condemned *in some Opinion which he professeth*; and he produces an Instance where I have said, That when a Man professeth one Thing, and practices another, we may know that he is self-condemned, *EITHER in his Practice or in his Profession!* This is Mr. Foster's own Way of stating the Case: For he says, that we have Reason to believe that such a Man knows himself to be in the Wrong, *either in condemning Theft, or in practising Theft*; but he does not pretend to say in which. I wonder the Gentleman did not tell me of one Instance more, in which I have said, we may know a Man to be self-condemned, which is, when a Man is weak enough to *confess* that he is self-condemned *: Tho' it would be ridiculous to put this Case, it had been much more pertinent than any thing else he has said on this Occasion.

Leaving therefore Mr. Foster to himself to make the best of his own Scheme, (in which it is very plain that I have no Share) I proceed to the general Point, *viz.* To shew what *can or cannot* be known of Hereticks without the Help of Preternatural Discernment. In this Matter I shall take Mr. Foster's own Account, who disclaims all absolute *Certainty* in the Case, and insists only

† My second Letter, p. 65.

* Second Letter, p. 64.

upon *probable Evidence*: His Words are these;
 “ By being *known*, I mean judged of with a great
 “ *Degree of Probability*; for as to an *infallible*
 “ Knowledge who are Hereticks, it cannot be
 “ pretended to, without a miraculous Illumina-
 “ tion upon any Scheme: Nor is it all necessary;
 “ for the Word *ἴδω*, KNOWING that he sinneth,
 “ and is condemned of himself, does not imply any
 “ such *strict* and *absolute Certainty*, as all must be
 “ fully appriz’d of who understand *Greek*.*” At
 present Mr. *Foster* shall enjoy his *Greek*. For as
 the Inquiry is not what the Scripture says, but
 what Mr. *Foster* says, there is no Occasion to ex-
 amine what *ἴδω* doth or doth not signify. But
 I propose it to all who understand *English*, whe-
 ther there can be any fuller Demonstration of
 any thing in the World, than this is, to prove
 that Mr. *Foster* hath run away from his first Prin-
 ciples. At first he insisted upon *certain Evidence*.
Since (says he) *it is so difficult* — CERTAINLY to
judge of Heresy, why should we be so forward to charge
it on our own Brethren †? Upon this foot it was
 that Issue was joined, and I agreed with him that
 Hereticks *could not be known* in these Times. But
 Now he says that Certainty is *not at all necessary*,
 but *good probable Evidence* will suffice. The Rea-
 son of the Difference is visible: For when Dis-
 cipline was to be *thrown out*, it was right to de-
 mand *certain Evidence*; which (in Mr. *Foster*’s
 Notion of Heresy) every one knows is not to
 be had. When it was to be *taken in*, some Evi-
 dence must be admitted, and therefore *probable*
Evidence, because *probable Evidence* is all that
 can be pretended to. No doubt many Cases may
 happen, in which it may be presumed, with *great*
Probability, that Men act against their own Con-

* Second Letter, p. 62.

† Sermon, p. 305.

Mr. FOSTER's second Letter. 23

viction. I never said or thought the contrary. But cannot Mr. *Foster* see, that in admitting *probable* Evidence as the Ground of Discipline in this Case, he runs counter to himself, and unhinges every thing which he hath maintained against the common Scheme? The Scheme which I contend for, is, That the Church *must* judge for herself by the Rule of God's Word, what is *the Faith delivered to the Saints*, and reject all who openly depart from it. What Fault does Mr. *Foster* find in this? Why, if you look back, you must observe that all his Objections centre at last in the *Uncertainty* of the Rule. The Sense of Scripture may be *mistaken*, and then will follow — such Consequences as you may consider at your Leisure, and as Mr. *Foster* will tell you more than enough of. But, I pray, if the *Uncertainty* of the Rule is an Objection in one Case, is not the *Uncertainty* of the Evidence as good an Objection in the other? Will Mr. *Foster* say, that Mens inward Convictions may *more certainly* be determin'd by external, probable Circumstances, than the necessary Points of Faith can be determin'd by the Scriptures, and sound Reason? What Inconsistency is this! My Scheme is *wrong*, because it rests not upon *Infallibility*: His Scheme is *right*, tho' it no more rests upon *Infallibility* than mine!

My Opinion, I confess, is, (as it is, I believe, the Opinion of all Mankind) that no Man ought to be rejected as a Heretick, unless upon *certain Evidence* he appears to be such. And this Point is as much secured in the common Scheme of Discipline, as it is or can be in any Human Judgment in the World. To shew this, it will be proper to state a short Comparison between Government Ecclesiastical and Civil; which is so much the more pertinent, because Mr. *Foster* says,
“ That

“ That let the Church but proceed upon such
 “ *strong Probabilities* in rejecting Hereticks, as *Civil*
 “ *Courts* proceed upon in trying and condemning
 “ Criminals that are brought before them, and ”

— What then? Why, he adds, “ She will be
 “ much more secure from Mistake and Rashness
 “ in her Censures, than it appears in Fact she has
 “ EVER been.” It is a strange Spirit that can
 force a Man thus out of his Way, for no other
 Reason than to cast Disgrace upon the Christian
 Church! What he ought to have said, is, That
 if the Church proceeds upon the same Proofs in
 rejecting Hereticks, that Civil Courts do in con-
 demning Criminals, HER JUDGMENT IS JUSTI-
 FIED. This is what he *must* say, if he is in
 Earnest in maintaining, that Hereticks *may be*
known and rejected in all Ages of the Church; or, if
 he will not say it, any body has a Right to say it
 for him. For tho’ the Judgment of the Church
 is a Judgment relating to *Spiritual Things*, still it
 is a *Human Judgment*, and must therefore pro-
 ceed upon such a Degree of Certainty as Human
 Judgments are capable of. Let us then compare
 the two kinds of Judgment together, and see
 which Method best agrees with the Practice
 of Civil Courts, Mr. *Foster’s* or mine.

All Judgment *supposes* a Rule of Judgment,
 which in Civil Courts is the Law of the Land,
 and in Ecclesiastical, the Scriptures, or Rules
 founded upon the Scriptures. A Judge in *West-*
minster-Hall may mistake the Interpretation of a
 Statute, as well as a Bishop may mistake the
 Sense of Scripture; yet Judgment must proceed;
 for otherwise there could be no Judgment. Mr.
Foster talks at every Turn of the Uncertainty of
 the Scriptures, exactly in the same Strain that
 Papists do, when they would set up Tradition, and
 the Authority of *their* Church. Take one Passage
 for

for a Sample. " Unless the particular Instances of Faith,
 " to depart from which constitutes the Sin of Heresy,
 " be clearly defined, and distinctly enumerated — in
 " the New Testament—it will follow, that the Chri-
 " stian Religion hath prescribed a Rule, by which to
 " frame a Judgment of Heresy, that ultimately re-
 " solves itself into FANCY and CONJECTURE: Or,
 " which is the same, every Man, having no more than
 " a Rule of WORDS, the Meaning of which is not
 " clearly stated and defined, is left by the Gospel
 " WITHOUT ANY CERTAIN RULE at all, and must
 " frame the Sense, which alone is the Rule for him-
 " self. This most essential Point, or, to speak more
 " properly, the Rule itself, must be determined by
 " Wisdom or Folly, as either of these happen to pre-
 " side; by *Enthusiasm* and *blind Zeal*; by *Ambition*,
 " *Selfishness*, and *Craft*." And a little after—" What
 " kind of departing from the Faith is Heresy? Or
 " how shall we know it, if the Scripture be abso-
 " lutely silent about it, (*i. e.* hath not distinctly
 " enumerated the particular Instances, &c.)? Why
 " nothing remains but that we must GUESS at it, and
 " find it out as well as we can. If it happens that
 " we have good Judgment and Sincerity, these must
 " help us to GROPE THE BETTER IN THE DARK;
 " otherwise *Ignorance*, *Passion*, and *Prejudice*, may
 " raise a Clamour, and suggest what they please for
 " Heresy. And is this the rational Plan upon which
 " the visible Church of Christ is to be formed! —
 " If the Case stands thus, and the visible Church be
 " a Society held together by WE KNOW NOT WHAT,
 " the Consequence must be †"—If Mr. *Foster* had
 been arguing for the Pope's Infallibility, he could have
 said nothing more to the Purpose. What Thanks the
 Papists owe him, let him consider. It is not to my
 Purpose at present to enter into the Merits of this
 Cause. For be the Scriptures as uncertain as Mr.
Foster has set them forth, they are the best Rule we

† Second Letter, p. 14.—16.

have; and as in Civil Cases the Laws of the Land, as interpreted by Civil Courts, are the Rule of Civil Judgment; so in Matters Ecclesiastical, the Scriptures, as interpreted by the Church, are the Rule of Judgment to the Church. The Uncertainty of the Scripture, therefore, as arising from *human Fallibility*, is a thing quite out of the Question. For if human Fallibility be no Objection against Civil Administrations, it can be none against Ecclesiastical: Or if it be an Objection against the common Scheme of Discipline, it must be an Objection against Mr. *Foster's* too. He thinks (you see) that going to the Scriptures for the *necessary* Doctrines of Faith, tho' under the Help of a good Judgment, and an honest Mind, is but *Guess-work*, and *groeping in the Dark*. But still he has a Creed, as every Christian must have; and the *Notion* of a Heretick cannot stand without it. Mr. *Foster* says, a Heretick is *one who acts against Conviction*. Conviction hath Reference to some *Opinion* of which a Man is convinced, and which must be considered as a *Doctrine of Faith* necessary to be believed. *Mere* acting against Conviction will not make a Man a Heretick; for I suppose Mr. *Foster* will not say (for Instance) that *breaking open Houses* against Conviction is Heresy. Nor would he condemn a Man as a Heretick, who should profess some *Opinion* against Conviction, unless *he* (Mr. *Foster*) himself were persuaded that it *opposed* some necessary Article of Faith. Mr. *Foster* then hath a Rule of Judgment in this Case, and therefore, unless he thinks *himself* to be infallible, he will be obliged to confess that the Exercise of Church Discipline may well consist with human Fallibility.

The Rule of Judgment being settled, the Case of Offenders comes next under Consideration; and here it is that the Use of *Evidence* comes in. For the *Evidence* hath no Relation to the *Rule*, but to the *Behaviour* of Men, as agreeing with the Rule, or as differing from it. When a Man is indicted for Murder, the Witnesses are not to prove that Murder is against Law, but that the Man is a Murderer. The
 , Question

Question in all these Cases is, *de Facto*, What hath the Man done? And if any Fact is proved which the Law declares to be Murder, the Man is condemned. So it is in the Ecclesiastical Courts: The Witnesses are not to shew *what* is Heresy, (for that the Church hath declared) but that the Man hath published some Opinion which the Church adjudges to be Heresy. Thus far then the Methods of Civil and Ecclesiastical Judgment exactly agree, in my Way of stating the Case. But in Mr. *Foster's* Way of stating it, they will widely differ. For *here* not only the *Act* but the *Principle* upon which a Man acts comes in Question, and the *Evidence* must shew, both that the Man hath published Heresy against the Law of the Church, and also that he hath done it, under Conviction that he hath sinned against the Law of God; and the Man shall be acquitted of the unlawful Act, (unless the contrary appears by *strong Probabilities*) upon pleading that his Conscience obliged him to it. This is most evidently the Method of Proceeding which Mr. *Foster* would set up in Cases of Heresy. But I will venture to say, that this is a Method unknown to all Courts of Justice in the World. He pretends that I have arraigned the *Practice of the Courts of Judicature*, and bids me apply my *Reasoning to the Case of Malice prepense in Murder*, which he has produced as an Instance to prove that the Law takes Cognizance of *Mens Views and Principles* *. But Mr. *Foster* must be taught to distinguish between *Views and Principles*, if by *Views* he means *Intentions*. The *Intention* the Law does inquire into in all criminal Cases, because it is the *Intention* that makes the Action criminal. But with *Mens Principles*, i. e. the Judgment of Conscience, whether the Action be right or wrong, the Law never concerns itself. If one Man kills another, the Question is, Whether it was done maliciously. The *Malice* proved, the Man is condemned; nor is it ever inquired whether he judged it right

or *fit* to kill his Neighbour. A Papist may think it an Act of Conscience to kill a Heretick: But if he does it, it is at his Peril: His Conscience shall not save him from Punishment.

Mr. *Foster* might have mentioned some other Cases from our Common Law, which would have had a much better Appearance. For Instance, If a Man receives stolen Goods, *knowing them* to be such — or, if he utters counterfeit Coin, *knowing it* to be such — the Law lays hold of him; but not otherwise. Might not Mr. *Foster* then with some better Shew of Reasoning have asked, Why then shall a Man be condemned as a Heretick, unless he *knows himself to be such*? But if he had mentioned these more plausible Cases, they would not have served him. For what is a Man to *know* in these Cases? Why only this, That the Goods were stolen, or that the Money is counterfeited. The *Knowledge* hath no Reference to the Law of *Conscience*, but to the Law of the *State* only. The Law does not forbid *all* receiving of Goods, but only of *stolen* Goods: Therefore if it is not *known* that the Goods were stolen, the Law *excuses* the *Act*, because there was no *Intention* to offend. A Man cannot plead Ignorance of the *Law*; for the Law *presumes* upon its own *Notoriety*: But tho' every Man is *presumed* to know that he is not to receive stolen Goods; no Man is presumed to know *what* Goods are stolen. This Point therefore rests upon Evidence: And when it is proved that the Man knew the Goods to be stolen, he cannot plead Conscience against the Law, and say, *I believed* (the Law notwithstanding) that I *might*, or that I *ought* to receive them. Apply all this to the Method of proceeding upon Heresy in Ecclesiastical Courts. As no Man is ever condemned for Heresy, unless he *persists* in his Heresy after Admonition; no Man therefore can be condemned as a Heretick, without *knowing* himself to be a Heretick, *i. e.* (for this is the Point) without knowing himself to be one whom the Church *adjudges* to be a Heretick.

Heretick. If upon Admonition the Man reforms, Judgment stops of course. If not, *Excommunication* follows: nor will any Plea of Conscience stand in Bar of Judgment: For the Church no more concerns itself with *Conscience* in the *one* Case, than Civil Courts do in the other.

I mention these Cases only to prevent Mistakes, if Mr. *Foster* should think it worth his while to take these Matters into farther Consideration, and to shew that in no Case *Civil Courts* take Cognizance of Mens *inward Convictions*, or the *Principles* upon which they act, as they regard *Conscience*. If a Reason be demanded for this, it is plain. The Law is the Security of common Right, which is equally affected by unlawful Actions, whether those who commit them have *Conscience*, or whether they have *none*. As Civil Laws are the Security of Civil Right, so Church Government is the Security of the *common Faith*; and bad Opinions will not be the less mischievous in their Effects, because they are *sincerely* embraced. If a Man thinks himself bound in Conscience to kill me, he is so much the more dangerous Enemy; and the more sincere a Man is in wrong Persuasions, with the more *Zeal* and *Diligence* will he endeavour to propagate them. Therefore instead of being the *less*, he is the *more* proper Subject of Discipline; for the principal End of separating an unsound Member from the Church, is to preserve the whole Body from Infection; according to that of St. Paul, 1 Cor. v. 7. *Purge out the old Leaven, that ye may be a new Lump.* And 2 Tim. ii. 21. *If a Man purge himself from these, (the Vessels of Dishonour, mentioned in the foregoing Verse) he shall be a Vessel unto Honour, &c.* which depends upon what he had said (Ver. 17.) of *Hymeneus* and *Philetus*, — *Their Word will eat as doth a CANKER.* Therefore the Rule is laid down UNIVERSALLY. — *If there come ANY unto you, and bring not this Doctrine, RECEIVE HIM NOT.* This Observation (if I mistake not) absolutely destroys Mr. *Foster's* Scheme, whether *new* or *old*. His first Scheme

Scheme throws out Discipline, because we cannot come at Conscience. His second takes it in, but limits the Exercise of it to such Subjects only as act against Conscience, of which he says the Church may judge by *probable* Evidence. But neither the one nor the other can be right, if the Reasons of Discipline have no *Relation* to the *Conscience* of the Offender, but to the *Offence only*. Mr. Foster has heard of this Argument before. I am sorry I have Occasion to repeat it so often. It was offered to him in my first Letter. He was called upon *particularly* to answer it in my second. But no Answer has he yet given; and I am persuaded he will never be able to give a reasonable one.

The Reader now sees the Agreement that there is between the common Method of proceeding both in Civil and Ecclesiastical Courts; which, as it is a Way of trying the Case *chosen* by Mr. Foster himself, will, I hope, carry so much the more Weight with it. The *Method* is *one*, and the *Reasons* are *one*; and it must now be submitted to the Judgment of the Reader, whether he will take the common Scheme of Discipline, with its *certain Evidence*, or Mr. Foster's new Invention, with its *strong Probabilities*. Both Schemes are liable to Uncertainty, more or less, as all *human* Schemes are, and must be. But in the one the Uncertainty affects the *Rule only*; in the other it affects the *Rule* and the *Evidence* both. And whoever will consider how difficult it is to get Evidence that will reach to Conscience, and in how few Cases it is *possible* to judge of Mens *inward Convictions*, as to the *Opinions* which they hold, even by *probable* Proofs, will easily discern which of the two Methods will best answer the great End of Church Discipline, *viz.* the forming and preserving a Society of Men *visibly* united in the *Profession* of every thing which is essential to the Faith of a Christian. The Gentleman observes, that in Civil Courts Judgment is given upon *strong Probabilities*. I know it is in *some Cases*: But this *probable Evidence* always relates to *Facts*,
not

not to *Conscience*; and when Mr. Foster has proved, that it is as *necessary* for the Church to determine concerning *Conscience* in Cases of *Heresy*, as it is for the State to determine concerning *Facts*, in those Cases where *probable Evidence* is admitted, I will allow of his *probable Evidence*. But in my Way of stating the Case, the Church has no Concern with *Conscience*, nor is there any *Use* of *probable Evidence*. And what has Mr. Foster to *object* to it? I have his own Confession, that in declaring that “*The Church hath no Right to insult or oppress; no Power over Mens Bodies or Goods; no, nor over their Souls neither, so as by any unjust Censure to bar them of God's Favour*”; I have stripped the excommunicating Sentence of the Church of all its *real Terror*—made “*great and noble Concessions*, which excite in him “*an agreeable Mixture of Pleasure and Surprise*. He counts it for a *Victory* to have drawn them from me, and thinks himself amply recompensed for all the Pains he has taken or may hereafter take “*in this Controversy* *.” I have the same Compliment from the *Old Whig* †, who says, “*That tho' I have not expressly renounced my former Opinions about Church Power—I have yet given up, in express Terms, several very important Points*”; and upon the Whole concludes, “*That few Friends to Liberty have ever claimed greater Exemption from the Effects of Church Power, than is here plainly admitted*.” What Triumphs do these Gentlemen raise to themselves, merely upon the Force of their own Imaginations! What is this *Renunciation* of *former Principles* which they talk of? What *Points* have I *given up* in my second Letter? Or *to whom* have I given them up? To Mr. Foster? Why?—Did I not set out upon this Foot? Are not these very *Concessions* (as they are called) to be found in my *first* Letter, as well as in my *second*? Or have I ever in my whole Life treated of Church Power in

* Second Letter, p. 23, 24.

† Number XXX.

any other Way? To this let all my former Writings speak. — But the Truth of the Case is this: Those *hard Speeches* which of late have been given out in Papers, and in Pamphlets against CHURCH RIGHTS, as claimed in the Church of *England*, were merely the Effects of Rashness, and Ignorance, and Want of Charity; and now these Gentlemen's Eyes come to be opened, and they see these Matters set before them in their true Light, they fall into *Wonder* and *Amazement*, as if the State of the Things themselves was really changed. The Wonder, and the *only* Wonder is this, that these Gentlemen should not see *before* what all Men of Sense saw except themselves. — But they are *now* at last convinced that no Harm is intended them. I am *glad* they are convinced. I hope the World will *take Notice* of it; and that these Gentlemen will so well *remember* their own *Testimonies*, that if hereafter they should think fit to enter upon these Points, we shall hear no more of *Ecclesiastical Tyranny*; of *Impositions*, and *Inquisitions* upon *Conscience*, &c. Things! which have no more *Agreement* with any thing that I have ever written or said, or thought, than Light has with Darkness. If they should forget this, I shall not forget it till I forget *myself*. And when I do forget myself, and exchange my *old* Principles for *new* ones, let me suffer those *Reproaches*, which as yet I have not deserved, and which *till then* I shall not deserve.

If I had ever given out such a Plan of Church Discipline as Mr. *Foster* has now published in his second Letter, I should not have found it so easy to excuse myself. I will not say that his Scheme is an INQUISITION, because the *Word* is odious: But I will say, (and I may *truly* and *properly* say) that it is an INQUIRY into *Conscience*, and that Mens Rights to the Privileges of Christian Communion, are to be determined by a Judgment *formed upon Conscience*, by *probable Evidence*. That the Scheme is *wrong*, I have shewn: I will now add that it is DANGEROUS, and may serve as a *Handle* to very bad Purposes. To make Mr. *Foster* sensible of this,

this, I will take leave to ask him one plain Question, WHOM would He think it safe to entrust with a Power to *fit in Judgment* upon his Conscience, and to determine by *probable Evidence*, whether He, in the Opinions which he professeth, does or does not *act against Conviction*? Let him consider of this, and answer it to himself at his Leisure. Mean while, I will observe that he has given sufficient Reason why no Man upon Earth should trust HIM in such a Case. I desire the Reader to attend to the following Passages :

“ The Persons (says he) who come nearest the Character of the old Hereticks, are *violent Party-Men*, who confine Christianity to their own Faction, and excommunicate all that differ from them; the *rigid Imposers* of human Schemes of Doctrine, and Modes of Worship, as essential Branches of Religion, and Laws binding Conscience. — A turbulent, factious, and persecuting Spirit is one of the *surest* Marks of Heresy; and when the Substance of Religion is placed in *trifling Speculations*, which have no manner of Connexion with Virtue and Morality, in *abstruse incomprehensible Mysteries*, or in *outward Shew and Ceremony*, we may CERTAINLY conclude, that if this does not proceed from a very *weak Head*, it must spring from a *dishonest Heart*.” Serm. p. 306, 307. Again,

“ Sects or Heresies may be formed about *Rituals*; about Things in themselves *indifferent*, and confessed to be indifferent, as well as about Points of Doctrine. And if the Leaders of these Sects, tho’ they pretend to aim at the Advancement of Religion by introducing greater *Solemnity, Order* and *Decency*, in the publick Worship, know, themselves, that they mean nothing but Interest, or to gratify their Ambition and Vanity, and consequently act against their inward Convictions, they may justly be described — as *factious, ill-designing, self-condemned Hereticks*.” Second Letter, p. 9.

Whether Discipline is to be laid aside, (as the Sermon speaks) or, whether it is to be retained, (as the

second Letter sets forth) Mr. *Foster*, you see, has left a way open to censure ALL whom he does not like: And one may guess without an Interpreter, who are the *violent Party-Men*, the *rigid Imposers of human Schemes of Doctrine, and Modes of Worship, &c.* who not only come nearest the Character of the old Hereticks, but bear about them the *surest Marks* of Herefy. Mr. *Foster* was jealous of some Repri- mand for this Abuse, and has guarded against it in a marginal Note upon the second Passage. "It may perhaps be proper for me to declare, in order to prevent Reproach and Insult, that I have put this only as a possible Case — without designing any particular Reflexions." Suspicious Caution! What does this but betray the *Consciousness* of the Man that he was doing the very Thing which he declares he had no Intention to do? If he thought the Passage liable to this Construction, and did not mean to cast Reflexions, why did he not strike it out, or mend it? — But to pass over this. It must be plain, that if a *violent Party-Spirit* be so sure a Mark of *Self-condemnation*, Mr. *Foster* will never want Evidence of a Man's being a Heretick, whenever he has a Mind to have it; for ALL, no doubt, are *violent Party-Men*, with HIM, who differ from him in their Persuasions, and think their Religion worth contending for. And in such a Case he will be under strong Temptations to compliment their good Sense, and allow them to have able Heads only to prove that they have wicked Hearts. God forbid that any one's Right to the Privileges of Christian Fellowship should depend upon the Measure of another's Charity. Yet this is the plain Consequence of Mr. *Foster's* Principles, for whom the most favourable Thing that one can hope, is, that he does not believe one Word of what he says himself. I pretend not (whatever he does) to determine any Thing about Mens inward Con-
victions; and therefore (as I have heretofore said) I must rest this Matter with his own Conscience. Either he will stand by his new Scheme, or he will not; and let

let him take his Choice. If he stands by it, he will have a very hard Thing upon his Hands, which is, to *justify* it. If he quits it; he *must* come to *mine*. Or, if, to avoid this, he shall go back again to his first Principles, (which he may do with just as good a Grace as he has now left them) old Difficulties will again return, and remain unanswered. These Difficulties have been set forth; but there is one among the rest which deserves particular Notice.

In Mr. Foster's first Account it was maintained, not only that none ought to be excluded from Communion, but those who opposed the Faith against Conviction, but also, that in the ordinary State of the Church none could judge of Mens inward Convictions; the Consequence of which is, that in the ordinary State of the Church none can be excluded from Christian Communion, and that if even a *professed* DEIST, for Reasons not apparent, should desire to be admitted to the Sacrament as a Christian, Mr. Foster upon his Principles ought not to refuse him. This Consequence was set before Mr. Foster in the close of my second Letter *, and I left it with him to consider upon what Foot the Church of Christ could be held together as a visible Society? Mr. Foster states the Question himself in his second Letter †, and gives this Answer to it. "The visible Church of Christ is to be held together as a Society — by an Union in the necessary Faith of Christians, and by Charity and mutual Forbearance, &c. — Nor by an Unity of Opinion, which is next to impossible, nor by an Uniformity of Profession, which can in many Cases be nothing else but Hypocrisy." This Answer is neither sufficient nor consistent. For,

1. What he here styles the *necessary Faith* of Christians, (by which, he says, the Church of Christ is held together as a visible Society) a little before, he calls *that Faith* which DETERMINES a Man's Right to Christian Communion. So that, it seems, there is a Faith by which the visible Church of Christ is

* P. 81. † P. 82.

held together as a Society, and *without which* no Man can have a *Right* to be admitted to Christian Communion. But this Answer does not *explain*, how there *can* be any *such Faith* consistently with Mr. Foster's first Principles, and every one sees it is *impossible* to be explain'd. For if there be *any one* Point of Faith, an *Opposition* to which will justify the Church in denying a Man the Privileges of Christian Communion *merely* for the Opposition-sake, or all Pleas of Conscience notwithstanding; Mr. Foster's Doctrine falls to the Ground. For it will not then be true, that *no* Man ought to be denied the Privileges of Christian Communion, *unless* in opposing the Faith he acts against the Conviction of his own Conscience.

2. The latter Part of the Answer is an express Contradiction to the first. For if there is a *Faith* by which the Church is held as a visible Society, and *without which* no Man can be admitted to Christian Communion; there *must* be, in order to qualify Men for Christian Communion, an *Unity of Opinion*, and an *Uniformity of Profession*, AS TO THAT FAITH. Yet Mr. Foster lays it down *absolutely*; that the visible Church of Christ is held together, NOT by *Unity of Opinion*, NOR by *Uniformity of Profession*.

Take the Thing, if you please, upon Mr. Foster's second Scheme, and see how it will come out. Here indeed there is Room for a Rule of Admission and Exclusion from Christian Communion, and Men may be admitted and excluded. *Excluded* (I say) that is, in here and there a *single Instance*, when they have not Art enough to *dissemble* their inward Convictions, and keep them out of the way of *probable Evidence*. Upon this foot, whosoever *make a fair shew in the Flesh*, (as the Apostle speaks) or (in Mr. Foster's own Words) *are so cautious as to keep clear of all open Vices, and affect an Air of SANCTITY, in order the more effectually to secure their Ends*, whatever be the Opinions they profess, they are not to be denied Communion, but to be *left to the Judgment of God*; contrary to primitive Rule, which was to exclude

ALL obstinate Opposers of the Faith; as has been shewn. Yet many of them are set forth in Scripture as *speaking Lyes in Hypocrisy; transforming themselves into Angels of Light; and by good Words, and fair Speeches deceiving the Hearts of the Simple.*

Which way soever therefore Mr. Foster turns himself, whether to his old Scheme, or to his new one, he is quite embarrassed; and will find no Help, but by coming to the common Method of Discipline which he has rejected. And what (I ask once more) is he afraid of? He confesses himself, that it is a *harmless Thing*; and so far he is in the right, that no Body can be hurt by it, but through his own Fault. He has the Judgment of *his own Writers* that it is *consistent* with the *Liberties of Mankind*, as pleaded for by those who are the *greatest Friends to Liberty*. What is it then that prompts Mr. Foster to persist in holding up an indefensible Argument? Why,—it is his *Zeal* against *ARTICLES, and Confessions, and Establishments*; of which he says (angrily) — *I am not at all CONCERNED about them.*—I CARE not what BECOMES of them*. If Mr. Foster's Reasons would bear him out, his *Resentments* would come with a better Grace; for if his Notions are *right*, all religious Settlements in the World are *wrong*. So MUCH doth this Question import. Mr. Foster may not be convinced of his Mistakes by the Arguments I have offered; but he may see Cause perhaps to *abate* a little of his *Self-confidence*: And, tho' he *disdains* to learn any Thing from *me*, I hope he will learn this from *himself*; that it will *become* him, for the future, to use more *decent* Language, when he speaks of such Matters as these.

One Word more with Mr. Foster, and I have done.

At the Close of my first Letter I gave him a *Caution* (so well I knew what I was to *expect* from him) not to charge me with being for *Persecution* in Consequence of my having asserted to the Church a Right to judge of Heresy. It might have been for his *Credit* perhaps to have taken my Advice. But *Perse-*

* Second Letter, p. 83.

cution is a favourite Topick with these Gentlemen, and it was to be thrown in my Teeth at any rate. And to find a handle for it (since none was to be found in my Letter) he goes back to a Treatise of mine, written several Years ago, upon the Subject of the *Rights of the Civil Magistrate in Matters of Religion*. In this Book I was led to consider not only what *Allowances* were proper to be made to *Conscience* (whose *Rights* I had asserted in the strongest manner) but also what *Restraints* might be laid upon those who might separate themselves from the established Religion upon mere worldly Views; *pretexting* Conscience, but having none. And to this Purpose, I thought, that such *pecuniary Mults* as no *conscientious* Man would be *unwilling* to pay, and every *prudent* Man, having *no real* Scruples, would chuse *not* to pay, might have their Use.

This Part Mr. Foster lays hold of; and if hard Words and opprobrious Language are to pass for Arguments, he has confuted it. He calls it a *Mahometan* Maxim; and is so fond of making me a mere Turk, that he never knows when to have done. For he mentions it in his first Letter, and no less than three Times in his second, where he says, that "if this Controversy continues, whenever I shall be pleased to assume the Air of a Friend to Liberty, and an Enemy to PERSECUTION, he shall look upon it as his Duty to be my faithful Monitor—that, if possible, he may prevail upon me to renounce publicly that vile persecuting Part of *Mahomet's* Doctrine, which I have heretofore espoused, &c. * " How long this Controversy is to continue, or what Occasions I may hereafter administer to Mr. Foster, for the Exercise of his great Benevolence towards me, I cannot tell. But this I assure him, that one good Reason to convince me of my Mistake, will weigh more than a hundred such *unchristian* Admonitions. His Reason I would attend to; his Abuses be to himself.

* Second Letter, p. 84.